Success by Design

Program Planning For Organizations

A program plan is the outline of events and activities that your members follow to reach the goals of the organization. A successful program plan provides detail and shows how each activity supports your organization's mission.

Mission ⇌ Goals ⇌ Program Plan

Good programs don't just happen. A program plan is more than a random list of activities. Developing a plan requires time, thought and commitment from your members. The effort put into developing a plan is worth it. It will give clear direction when making decisions about activities. It focuses the organization's resources on activities that achieve the mission. It's also a way to increase member contribution and involvement.

Follow these steps to develop a program plan that will interest and involve your members and project the image you want for your organization.

Identify Your Organization's Purpose

Use the organization's mission statement in developing program plans. A mission statement outlines the reason you exist as an organization. A good mission statement briefly describes what the organization plans to do, for whom and how. Frequent discussion on the organization's purpose helps keep the organization on track and ensures that members are aware of why the organization exists. Critically review your mission statement every few years and update if necessary.

Clear goals and objectives of the organization are essential when developing a successful program plan. Ensure that your programs support the organization's goals. If the programs do not relate to the goals, you need to review both the goals and the programs. One or the other needs to be changed to achieve a good fit.

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Analyze the Situation

Take a look at your existing programs. Do you need to do a member or community survey? Have there been changes since you developed your original program plan? Are there gaps in your programs that need to be filled with new approaches or activities? A thorough assessment is a good place to start.

Identify Alternatives

Look at a variety of solutions, ideas and activities to achieve the organization's goals. Let your creative juices flow. Use brainstorming techniques, discussion groups, surveys and suggestion boxes to collect/generate ideas. Involve as many of the members as you can to explore alternatives. The best program plans are developed when many members express their needs and interests. Member involvement is key to the success of the program plan. Members also take more responsibility if they have been involved from the beginning.

Review Your Resources

List all the resources the organization has - money, time, physical and human resources. Compare the cost of the alternatives with the resources of the organization. You want to achieve the maximum impact with these resources.

Don't discard an excellent idea just because you might lack some resources. Perhaps some modification of the activity will enable you to implement the plan. Review the resource itself. For example, is there any way to get more money, volunteers or the space required? Consider how you can share resources with other organizations. Creativity does wonders to stretch limited resources.

Make Decisions

Once all the ideas have been compiled and the alternatives and necessary resources have been thought through, it's time for decisions.

Focus the planning in a few areas. The temptation to try everything can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. If there are too many ideas and activities, go back to the overall purpose of your organization. This helps you decide which plans need to be done now, which are longer term and which plans should be eliminated.

Fill in the Details

The details and action to carry out the ideas need to be outlined. On a flow chart or spreadsheet, outline the specific tasks to be done, who's responsible, the timelines and the date each task is to be completed. This written record becomes an easy and valuable reference. It also helps build the accountability needed to get things done. It keeps group members well informed and can form the basis of regular progress reports from the members or committees.

Evaluate

A part of any successful program plan is the criteria used to evaluate success. Think about how you will know when the organization has reached its goals or at least made progress toward achieving its goals. The evaluation criteria should be identified early in the program planning process.

Set specific times to measure success. Evaluation shouldn't be left to be done at the completion of an event, activity or program. Reviewing the program plan regularly ensures things are on track. Some built in flexibility is needed to revise the plan as changing circumstances dictate.

Celebrate the successful parts of the program. Learn from the ineffective activities. By evaluating the program and the planning process each year, you can improve your planning skills and increase the odds of achieving your goals.

Summary

Take the time to develop a clear and meaningful program plan for your organization. Your image, performance and long-term success depends on it.

Adapted from *Program Planning for Organizations*, 1989, written by Ruth Friendship-Keller, with the permission of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food.